

Loyal 'till the End

by flaversei

Category: One Piece

Genre: Angst, Friendship

Language: English

Characters: Ace, Luffy, Straw Hats P., Zoro

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-10 08:18:57

Updated: 2016-04-17 02:57:37

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:41:14

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 7,000

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Amidst the chaos, Zoro who carries the hope of his unconscious nakama has to choose; whether he kills Luffy, or backs down and watches as his possessed captain wipes out the whole crew. Now, which one will he choose?

1. Chapter 1

Hello! Flaversei here~ :D

Before you jump into the story and blame me later, let me tell you this. 'Someone' might or might not die, I can't spoil it here, but at least I can guarantee a happy ending :)

Though the end of this chapter might piss you off a bit (since it's a cliffhanger), but I plan on posting the last chapter - a decent ending next week!

A/N: I swear this was supposed to be a very, very short drabble but this got too long and I had to write a whole two chapters of it. Not sorry though.

Well, thank you for reading and I do hope you'll like it!

Enjoy!

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><p>Loyal 'till the End.

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It is chaos.

Blood. Dead bodies. Wounded friends. Desperate screams. Anguished cries.

Broken, blood stained swords. A half-burnt straw hat. _Luffy._

Zoro stands amidst the chaos. His body is scarred in all places and it is only by sheer willpower that he still manages to stand up. Two of his swords lay beside his feet, broken. His bloody hand holds the only sword he has left, Wado Ichimonji, with the utmost care, as if it is made of fragile glass.

Zoro trembles. Fear, sadness, rage, exhaustion, pain; among all the emotions he feels, what stands out the most is none other than,

Confusion.

Because in front of him stands _his captain_.

Because _his nakama_ are laying unconscious around him.

Because his captain has _attacked_ all of them.

Because _he_ is the only one who can put an end to this chaos,

And Zoro has no fucking idea what to do.

"ZORO! DO IT!"

An anguished scream from his captain pulls Zoro out of his thought. He reluctantly takes a step back as he tightens his grip on Wado. Never has he felt so conflicted like this before. The infamous master swordsman, Roronoa Zoro, right now is afraid to swing his sword. The reason is none other than the one who had given him so much; his own captain, Luffy.

But the Luffy that stands in front of him is no longer the Luffy that he knows.

Black mists and slimes are what covering his whole rubber body. Evil spirits have taken his freedom. These things combined altogether have controlled his whole being, to _hurt _and _kill _" something Luffy would never do for no good reasons.

It is nightmare. No, even worse than a nightmare.

Luffy has never felt so _broken_ before. When he lost Ace, he could get back up because he still has his nakama. This time it's different. The captain is on the verge of losing his whole crew, by his own hands.

It all started just few minutes ago.

The moment Luffy started going berserk, each member of the Strawhat

had tried to save him. They were prepared to do anything, to throw away anything to get him back, even if that meant throwing their life away in the process.

Because Luffy is the one who has given them the life they are living right now, and losing him is like losing a part of their soul, a part of their life. Losing Luffy is like being thrown back into the darkness without a single ray of hope, because he is like the bright guiding light that has freed them from the darkness that was their old life. That is just how important Luffy is to them.

So they fought the one-sided battle. They had struggled, resisted, and had done everything they could do in their power to help their precious captain, but in the end it was useless. None of them truly has the heart to hurt their crying, desperate captain. None of them has the heart to inflict any damage to Luffy when he is already suffering so much.

The cursed evil spirit inside Luffy had forcefully controlled his body. No matter what Luffy did, his body wouldn't listen to him. It moved, hurt and attacked them, mercilessly assaulted anyone who got close to him. A massacre might be a fitting word to describe the situation. Each of them had tasted the force of their captain's fist, the power of his kick, the actual strength of their captain and how nearly impossible it is to actually beat the future Pirate King. Any ordinary person would've lose with few punches, but they preserved. They were on the verge of death itself after having their own fights with other enemies, but they fully understood that the one who suffered the most at the time was Luffy; their pain was something so insignificant compared to the burden their captain carries. They fought and fought until they couldn't anymore.

A crew. On the verge of death. Attacked by the captain they had been following for years.

Now Zoro stands alone, carrying the hope of his already unconscious nakama.

Luffy cries. Depression, rage, sadness, pain, regrets, dread, self-loathing, all these emotions build up inside him and Luffy has the urge to just end his life right here, right now. He has hurt his own crew, his own friends, family. He almost killed the precious people who had put their everything on the line for him. He was so close to end the life of people that he treasures more than anything else.

If he really loses them now, Luffy has nothing left. His crew is his everything. Losing them is like losing a place where he belongs. It's the same as losing a reason to live. Because losing them is a proof that he's still so weak and Luffy couldn't live alongside the regrets of not being able to protect anything. Not anymore. He's already broken enough.

If there is someone who can prevent the nightmare from turning into something even worse, it is him,

Zoro.

He, of all people, is the only one who managed to stay conscious even after taking few deadly blows to his vital organs. Physically, Zoro

is beaten and wounded. Mentally, Zoro has crumbled. Still, Zoro refuses to yield. Losing is not an option to him. He can't afford to lose. His captain is suffering and he must not lose.

But what should he do?

"ZOROOO!"

Luffy screams in agony as his fisted palm coated with Haki is stretched against his will and is flying towards Zoro. The swordsman doesn't have the heart to block the attack. If his captain is hurting, then it's only natural for him to also suffer. The least he can do is to go through the same amount of pain.

The punch collides with his already wounded chest with so much force that Zoro falls to his knees, coughing up blood.

"ZORO, PLEASE! PLEASE KILL ME!"

Luffy's voice is croaky, sore, and it's the most heartwrenching voice Zoro has ever heard. No words can even describe how heartbreaking it is for the swordsman.

Mustering his strength, Zoro stands up. His vision is getting blurry and he can literally feel the cracks on his bones and joints as he struggles to stand. He looks up, and upon seeing Luffy, Zoro grimaces. Luffy is in no better condition than he is. Zoro notices the amounts of cuts and bruises on his rubber body, the way his legs tremble, some self-inflicted wounds, and above all, the tears; all the sadness and pain and regrets written all over his captain's face.

Zoro bites his lips. He has no time to complain about his own wounds. He needs to do something. The only solution is

No.

"ZORO! KILL ME!"

Can't.

Zoro shuts his eyes. He knows what he has to do. He knows that the only way out of this chaos is to kill Luffy. He knows that. He already knows, dammit!

Luffy is his captain, his savior, his family, his joy, his friend, his purpose; someone he must protect, someone who will be the King, someone who shouldn't die " and Zoro has willingly taken the responsibility of making sure that Luffy will achieve his dream, no matter what. How can Zoro kill such a significant figure like him? How can he take the life of someone who had given him a life?

How can he.

Does the world hate them? Is that why all of this happens? Does it have to end here, like this? They are so close. They are only one step away from their " their captain's " dreams. So close. One step away and does it have to end like this?! Screw that.

Zoro grits his teeth and tightens his grip on Wado. Luffy is the man who will become the Pirate King. That is an absolute, undeniable fact. Zoro refuses to be the jerk who have to kill his captain when he is so close into achieving his lifelong dream.

Then how? How can he end this without sacrificing anyone " without killing his precious captain?

If he has to choose, Zoro will gladly take Luffy's place. If he is the one who got possessed, he can simply kill himself along with that cursed spirit and end everything. That sounds great " better than letting Luffy suffer like this.

Oh. Wait. Is that possible?

At the thought, Zoro musters up what little strength he has left and walks towards his captain. The thought of him dying doesn't bother him at all. Instead, the thought of him saving his captain brings joy to his heart.

"Zoro what are you doing?! GET AWAY FROM ME!"

Luffy's voice cracked as he takes few steps back. _No. Please, no._ He doesn't want to hurt his friends anymore. Isn't it enough? When will he wake up from this nightmare? Please, oh please. Can he just die here now?

Luffy raises a hand and punches his own chest, but the slimes stop him in his track. This evil spirit won't let him die. _Why?!_

He's way beyond hurt. This is worse than a nightmare. This is hell. Maybe even worse than that, because Luffy has hurt his own precious nakama. He almost killed them, and now if he can't stop himself, he will _kill Zoro_.

Oh please. Luffy wishes he can just die. Why does it have to end like this? Luffy curses his weakness, his inability to protect anything. First, Ace. Now, will he also lose his nakama because he isn't strong enough? How _weak._ How _helpless._

Zoro steadily walks step by step, Wado Ichimonji on his hand. The black slimes have constantly attacked him, but Zoro doesn't bother to dodge. He is sure his pain is nothing compared to the pain and agony his captain is feeling right now. The black mists surrounding Luffy have started affecting him. Zoro inhales some and he can already feel his lungs burning with pain, but he ignores that too. Death is only seconds away from claiming his life, but that doesn't matter, does it?

"ZORO! STAY AWAY! PLEASE!"

He looks straight into Luffy's pained eyes. This boy, the boy he has been following for years will be the Pirate King. He will make sure of that.

So when he is right in front of Luffy, Zoro ignores the constant stabbing on his body. He doesn't know how to make this evil spirit move to his body, but he have to try anyway.

"W-Wha... What... What are you doing... Zo... Zoro..."

Luffy's voice trembles like a child and it hurts Zoro to see his confident, cheerful, charismatic captain like this. Luffy is hope and joy personified. He's not supposed to be crying. He should be smiling, because that's the right thing. So Zoro will gladly take his place to suffer.

Zoro puts his hand on Luffy's head and ruffles his hair gently. His voice is croaky yet reassuring when he says, "Now, captain. Don't cry here. You have to go all the way to your dream. Go there and be the Pirate King, okay?"

Luffy stares in horror when he feels the evil spirit slowly leaving his body and he sees black mists forming and gathering around Zoro's horribly wounded body.

"Wh... Whatâ€¦!"

Zoro has no idea how it work, but he can feel something evil entering his body. _It hurts like hell_. This thing is even much more painful than Thriller Bark. And he almost died there. _Damn_. Why does his captain always carries the heaviest burden?

"Z-Zoro...?"

Zoro doesn't even have the strength to answer. He shuts his eyes and grits his teeth in a futile attempt to contain the pain. He can feel the wicked thing trying to take control, but _no_. He won't lose to this damn cursed creature. So Zoro lifts up his sword. He can hear Luffy mumbling something, but he can't figure out what is it. He can feel Luffy gripping his arms, begging him to stop, but Zoro won't stop. He has to end it here.

_ 'Forgive me for disobeying captain's order, Luffy.' _

At the end, Zoro thinks, he does feel bad for Kuina for not being able to achieve his dreams, but to die in the sword that carries their dreams is not so bad after all.

He raises his sword up high, and when Zoro feels the evil spirit gnawing at his heart, he swings his sword down.

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And he sees darkness.

Complete darkness.

But he is conscious.

And without pain.

Zoro looks around. He sees nothing but darkness. Is he dead? Does death feel like this? Painless?

Then he feels warmth. A familiar, calming warmth.

He feels _fire_.

And Zoro is quick to turn around, where he sees...

"No way..."

The sight is so unbelievable that Zoro unconsciously holds his breath as he recognizes the familiar figure standing in front of him.

It is him.

Zoro hardly believes what he sees.

"Ace..."

The older brother approaches him with an annoyed face; small flames flickering on his shoulder. Zoro is still frozen from the shock that he doesn't have time to react when Ace, without any warning, punches his face.

"How dare you?!" Ace shouted.

Ace winces at the confused look Zoro is giving him. He coats his fist in fire and throws another punch, harder than before.

"HOW DARE YOU!"

Zoro feels no pain yet he still feels the force Ace put on his fist. A punch that strong could've broken his jaw yet Zoro feels nothing. His mind is still hazy, trying to grasp the situation he is in. Is he dead? Is that why he can see Ace? Why is Ace punching him? What made him so angry at Zoro?

"Aceâ€|?"

With another punch to his face, Zoro is pissed. He gets back on his feet, arms grabbing the older man's shoulder â€" too bad Ace never wears shirt. At this point Zoro realizes that he is almost as tall as the older man, but Ace is still exactly the same as he was two years ago. Right. Dead people don't ageâ€|

"What was that for, Ace?!"

Ace snarls back. Rage and anger are written all over his face.

"That's my question! What do you think you're doing, dumbass?! I know my idiot little brother might've picked some idiots along the way, but I don't know that one of them can be such a brainless idiot like you! And you still call yourself the first mate?" He scoffs. "Huh. Don't make me laugh. Someone like you is not worthy of the title. You just make Luffy suffers."

Zoro fisted his hands. Did Ace just say he is not worthy? After all the things he had done? Not that Zoro boasts about his position, but he at least is aware that he did a pretty decent job in serving the captain. What have he done that make Luffy suffer?

"I don't know what are you talking about, but you sure are quick to judge people, huh? What do you know about me anyway?! You're already dead! You know nothing!"

"Yes, I am dead; but y__ou," Ace hisses. He grabs Zoro by the

collar and pulls him closer. His glare terrifies even someone as fearless as Zoro. Unwilling to show his weakness, Zoro shot a challenging look.

Ace takes a deep breath.

"YOU. DIE. YOU DIE. IN. FRONT. OF. LUFFY! HOW DARE YOU?! HOW DARE YOU DO THAT?! THAT'S PATHETIC! DON'T YOU KNOW HOW BROKEN HE WAS WHEN IT WAS ME WHO DIED BEFORE?! DON'T YOU KNOW HOW PAINFUL IT WOULD BE FOR MY CRYBABY LITTLE BROTHER TO SEE YOU DIE IN FRONT OF HIM RIGHT NOW, HUH?!"

Zoro's eyes widen as realization strikes him like a bolt of lightning.

"ARE YOU STUPID? DO YOU THINK LUFFY WILL BE HAPPY IF YOU SACRIFICE YOURSELF?! WELL, LET ME TELL YOU. HE WON'T. EVEN IF YOU TELL HIM TO GO ALL THE WAY TO THE END AND BE THE KING, HE WON'T. BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT? HE, MY LITTLE BROTHER, REFUSES TO ACHIEVE HIS DREAM IF HE HAS TO SACRIFICE A FRIEND! KNOWING LUFFY, HE... Heâ€¦ He wouldâ€¦ Ratherâ€¦ D__ie."

There is a distinct fear on his face when Ace spoke out the last word.

Zoro can't find the strength to reply. His body becomes limp all of a sudden. Ace's words struck him so hard that Zoro finds it hard to even breathe. Ace is right. Every single word that he said makes perfect sense. How come Zoro doesn't realize it sooner? He has spent more time with Luffy than the rest of the crew, how can he come to a conclusion that would certainly hurt â€" even worse, broke â€" his captain?

"AND THAT IS YOUR FAULT. ALL OF IT. LUFFY WILL FOREVER HATE HIMSELF FOR BEING WEAK. HE WON'T BECOME THE PIRATE KING! HE WILL BLAME HIMSELF FOR EVERYTHING AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!"

Ace roughly pushes him and Zoro loses the strength to even stand. All that's left on him are regrets and pain and self-loathing. Panic overcomes him as he thinks about his captain; alone, crying over his dead body.

"Noâ€¦ No, no, no, NO! That can't beâ€¦ I wasâ€¦ Oh what have I done?!"

Frantically Zoro looks around. Darkness is all he can see other than himself and Ace. Where is he? How can he go back? He is not dead yet, is he?

Zoro quickly regains his composure and stands back up.

"Ace, I... I'm... I'm sorry. Iâ€¦ I wasn't thinking... I want to take away his pain... I thought I was saving him, but..." The swordsman falls short of breath as the consequences of what he had done finally hits him.

Zoro scratches his head and groans. "Anyway! Tell me. How can I get back? Where is this? I have to go back. I have to save Luffy. I... I need to be by his side, or else, heâ€¦ Luffyâ€¦ Luffy will_â€¦_"

When Ace doesn't bother to look at him, Zoro is prepared to throw away his pride. He bows, no, he is practically on his knees, head touching the invisible floor. "Please, Ace. I beg you. Tell me. _Please_. Even if I'm already dead, there must be some other way for me to help him. _Please._"

The sudden action catches Ace off guard. At the honesty and loyalty of his brother's first mate, Ace's lips form a small, gentle smile. He immediately hides it though, when he walks closer and kneels down.

"Fine. I'll tell you. Right now, thankfully you are not dead _yet_."

Zoro abruptly raises his face.

"But I wasâ€"

"Hear me out. You have to thank me. I actually don't know how it happened, but somehow, I was able to stop time and transfer your consciousness to this space. Time stopped for you right before you swing that sword down."

He beams with relief. "Then Luffyâ€!"

Ace grimaces. "I can't say that he's okay. You felt the pain, didn't you? Anyway, I can take you back there. _Under two conditions_."

Ace's expression steeled and Zoro knows Ace won't take _no_ for an answer.

"First. Don't _you_ dare die. No. Not in front of Luffy. Second, don't let _Luffy_ die either. If you do that, I will personally come to take your life, consequences be damned."

Zoro's face is full of determination when he nods his head. Then he's reminded that minutes ago he came to the conclusion of killing himself because he couldn't find a way to save both of them.

He cringes. "But how?"

Ace lightly punches the younger man's head. "Stop looking so pitiful like that. There is one way. This is something that only you, a master swordsman can do. That evil spirit has roots. It is located somewhere deep in Luffy's body."

Zoro gulps. This can't be good...

"To be precise, it is somewhere near his heart."

Right. Of course. It has to be in such a vital part. Oh great. This is so damn great.

"The spirit might've moved to your body, but the roots stay in Luffy's body. All you have to do is cut it cleanly without doing as much as wounding his heart â€" or anything else. Your Observation Haki will tell you the exact place, I presume. Cut it and it's all over. Can you do it?"

Zoro closes his eyes. He is given a second chance. Another chance to save his dear captain. He is sure as hell not gonna mess this up. _Failure is not an option_.

The moment he opens his eyes, it is filled with determination and Ace feels his worry being washed away.

"I won't fail."

At that exact moment, Ace knows that what he is hearing is an absolute fact. Every single person on Luffy's crew is just like his own Whitebeard crew. He knows that. They are loyal 'till the very end. Ace is sure that they are the rare kind of people that are prepared to do anything for Luffy - their captain. They will go all the way to the deepest part of hell if it's for Luffy. Ace has no doubt about it. If he is still alive, he would certainly loves to meet each one of them in person and thanks them for everything they had done for his little brother.

They stand up and Ace places his hand on Zoro's shoulder. He smiles bitterly at the younger man when a certain memory crosses his mind. "I envy you, actually."

Zoro opens his mouth to ask, but stops when he understands what Ace means. _Luffy's scars. Marineford._

"I will protect him, I swear."

A smile forms in his freckled face when Ace says, "I know you will."

Ace's fire envelops Zoro's body in a warm sensation. At the last seconds, Zoro sees tears forming on the big brother's eyes.

"Take care of my little brother for me, okay?"

_x-

And he sees darkness.

Complete darkness.

And he is conscious.

And every inches of his body burns with an excruciating pain like none he has ever felt before.

"ZORO! STOP IT!"

Then Zoro comes back to his senses.

When he opens his eyes, he is greeted by the heartwrenching sight of Luffy crying and shouting and desperately trying to move his already limp body to stop Zoro. The sight alone is enough to make Zoro curses himself for actually thinking that to die is the best option. He stops his hand in mid air before his sword manages to stab his own heart. Black mists cover his whole body and Zoro can feel it destroying him from inside. Casting aside the pain, he steeled his resolution.

Zoro has promised Ace. He has vowed to himself not to fail. He will save Luffy. He refuses to lose here.

So he smiles.

The intolerable pain has caused him to cough up blood, yet Zoro smiles a reassuring smile. With a croaky voice, he says, "It's okay, Captain. Everything's gonna be all right. Will you trust me?"

Luffy quiets down. He sees determination on his first mate's eyes and Luffy knows Zoro will never disappoint him. He wipes his tears and bites his lips, but his body still trembles and his eyes are still teary. Like a child trying to act strong.

'_Take care of my little brother for me, okay?__'__

When Luffy nods his head, Zoro finds the strength to go on.

Ignoring the pain, he closes his eyes. He focuses what little strength he has left to concentrate on his Observation Haki. One miss and it's the end.

Zoro tightens his grip on Wado. The mental image of him stabbing his own captain is disturbing enough; he doesn't want to make it worse by missing and actually kill his captain. No. _Definitely no._

His Haki scans Luffy's body. The vision is blocked by mists, but Zoro can see it. Ace is right. It is there, just right beside the heart, there is something that looks like a thin black string. The angle is very small and indeed, if Zoro misses by just one millimeter, Luffy's life will be in a great peril.

Zoro takes a deep breath. When he holds his sword, there is no hesitation in him. As he raises the sword, Zoro looks straight into Luffy's eyes. _He won't fail._

"Trust me, captain."

Luffy stands still. He trusts Zoro, no matter what. Even when Zoro is about to stab him, Luffy trusts him completely.

Zoro can feel the mists destroying him from inside while the slimes grazing and hurting every inches of his body. Yet faltering he does not.

At one exact point Zoro points his beloved Wado Ichimonji. The blood of his captain will stain this sword, but it's okay.

Steeling his determination, Zoro takes another deep breath.

With a thrust, everything is over.

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Enjoy!

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><p>Loyal 'till the End.

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Pain. That word alone explains the feeling Nami has right now.

She slowly opens her eyes and looks around. Her memories are hazy but Nami recognizes the place. Her hazy memories confuse her as she tries to remember how the beautiful landscape turned into something terrifying like this. Most of the greeneries had turned into ash. It is black and red and gray everywhere. Nami remembers they were having a fierce fight with marines and pirates and then... There is also something...

Her body freezes as she notices a half-burnt straw hat on the distance. A certain memory of a possessed Luffy attacking everyone comes to her mind and she finds herself running to the straw hat.

Nami is on the very verge of tears. The memory is way beyond terrifying. It broke her heart seeing a crying, desperate Luffy shouting orders for them to go away; how Luffy had tried to hurt himself; how the evil spirit forced him to punch and kick and hurt them; how Luffy begged them to just kill him. Luffy must be suffering. She can't even imagine how broken her captain was.

As she carefully holds the straw hat, Nami scans her surroundings for the others. When she sees no signs, however, Nami can only pray to whatever deities exist up there to protect her dear nakama; to protect her dear captain.

She walks, finding her way through the destroyed landscape. And when she sees two familiar figures in the distance, her blood runs cold.

Because the two are Zoro and Luffy, laying unconscious.

Because the number of wounds on their body far exceeded any Nami has ever seen before.

Because the pool of blood around their bodies is way too much for any human to stay alive.

Because Nami can't sense nor see any movement from the bodies.

So she runs. She runs towards her friends, ignoring her own pain and fatigue. And when she is right there, Nami can't hold back the tears anymore. If any human, " any living beings " can survive this, that will be by pure miracle.

She has seen Luffy and Zoro horribly injured after a fight countless time before. The wounds were always severe, but none of those injuries was as severe as this one. There is a stab mark right on Luffy's heart and there is a small gaping hole on Zoro's stomach.

Nami has to fight the urge to vomit. How can something like this happen? _No._ How could _she_ became unconscious when something like this happen? _How dare she._

Before she can start grieving, though, Nami knows what she has to do. A doctor. She needs Chopper. Screw possibilities, her eyes might deceive her and she won't believe anything else beside their doctor's words.

They are fine. They are alive. She believes it. Because she is a Strawhat. Their captain is miracle personified and they _do_ believe in miracles.

And again, Nami runs. She finds Chopper buried under a pile of rubbles and she quickly pulls him out. Nami is a bit rough when she tries to wake Chopper, but she fully understands that a mere second difference might have a big impact on the lives of their captain and swordsman.

"Chopper! Wake up! Please! Luffy and Zoro are dying! Please, you have to wake up!"

Chopper wakes up with a startled expression. He stands up and looks around frantically. "What? Where?! Luffy? Zoro?!"

Nami sighs in relief and without any delay, she carries the wounded reindeer as she sprints back to where she found their bodies. Chopper practically jumps when he sees the horrible condition they are in. How can he let something like this happen? _How dare he._

Tears begin forming on his eyes but Chopper fights it back. The word 'hopeless' is one word he refuses to say about a patient's condition, no matter what. Because he is a Strawhat and they are really bad at giving up.

So Chopper tries.

And it is like a miracle. One by one, in less than a minute, other members of the Strawhat find their way back to their captain. One by one come running with a worried expressions, and as soon as they see the horrible conditions Luffy and Zoro are in, their hearts break a little, but none of them loses hope. Instead, they move and offer their help to aid in the treatment of the two despite their own critical injuries. None of them accepts Chopper's treatments before they are sure that both Luffy and Zoro are okay. Franky even volunteers to donate his blood, as it is fortunately of the same type as Zoro, even though his own cyborg body is almost torn apart.

Chopper is a doctor. He knows all about human's body and judging by the severity of the wounds, he fully understands that any other people would've died in no time. There are heartbeats, very faint and unstable. Any other people would've given up on healing the two, but

they won't be a Strawhat if they give up and let one of them die.
No. No way.

Chopper examines the stab wound on Luffy's chest. The cut is unbelievably clean and small; it is definitely the work of Zoro. Chopper can't figure out what did Zoro cut, nevertheless, he is relieved because the cut doesn't harm the heart. It doesn't even harm any other organs or veins other than a very small spot beside Luffy's heart.

It is still too early to say that they are okay, but it is not impossible to save the two.

A miracle will happen for sure.

****_X_****

Roughly three hours later they finish taking care of the two wounded crew. It was nothing short of a miracle that they managed to arrive just in time before the wounds were infected. It is nothing short of a miracle that the life of both Zoro and Luffy are not in an immediate danger.

It is truly a miracle.

All members of the Strawhat are beyond relieved to see the face of their captain sleeping so peacefully. The image of Luffy going berserk still haunts them, and they sure miss his wide, stupid, innocent grin right now.

Zoro, on the other handâ€¦|

The little stab mark and the incredulous amount of wounds on his body have more or less explained the situation. It's like Thriller Bark all over again. Zoro has fought for their captain. And he has succeeded. That is enough. Nami secretly considers spending some of their fortune on beer and sake later. And of course, lots of meat.

****_X_****

When Luffy first opens his eyes, three days have passed. He is greeted by the sight of an all too familiar ceiling of the ship's infirmary. His mind is foggy as he tries to collect his thoughts. His body feels heavy and it hurts here and there, but Luffy feels like he should be worrying about something else right now.

That is when he turns his face to the side, where he sees... Zoro. A fully bandaged Zoro.

Memories come back to him, and he screams.

****_X_****

A scream from the infirmary shock the whole inhabitants of Thousand Sunny. Each and every single member of the Strawhat minus Zoro and Luffy stop whatever they are doing and rush to the infirmary.

"LUFFY!"

The infirmary's door bursts open as they rush inside.

What they find inside nearly move them into tears.

Luffy, with all the injuries on his body, has fallen to the floor. He crawls, trying to move his nearly limp body to reach the unconscious swordsman's bed on the other side of the room.

"Z... Zo... Zoro..."

His voice is dry and croaky. They can see the fear on his face and the tears forming on his eyes.

Chopper is the first to react. "Luffy! Stop! What are you doing? Your wounds will reopen if you move!"

Followed by Sanji who approaches him and gently, with the utmost care, carries Luffy back to his bed, "You shitty-captain. Go back to your bed! I'll feed you up later."

Usopp sprints back to the galley and come back with a glass of water. "Luffy, don't overdo it!"

Robin grabs a towel and sits on the bedside, slowly wiping sweat from her captain's head. "Please, you still need to rest, captain."

Franky is trying to fight back his manly tears as he leans on the door. He understands that his big body takes a lot of space, so he won't go in even though he really wants to pull Luffy in a hug out of relief.

Nami walks in and carefully helps Chopper to replace Luffy's already-bloodied bandages.

Brook sits in the corner of the room, playing soothing sounds with his violin. He knows that Luffy must be suffering even now, so he hopes to at least soothe his worry a little with his music.

Luffy stares at his nakama one by one, feeling completely safe and secure. His gaze then finds the bruises each of them have. Luffy grimaces.

"I'm... Sorry..." He whimpers.

Each and every single member of the Strawhat smiles a reassuring, genuine smile at their almost crying captain. At the sight, Luffy knows. He knows that none of them resents him for what happened. Still, he despises a part of him that had hurt his precious family so bad.

So Luffy bites back a smile and averts his gaze. He doesn't want to feel relieved just yet. It feels wrong for him to be happy after what he had done. He wants some kind of punishment, something to remind him of his weakness and his failure to protect them.

Noticing his sadness, Nami places something on his face and Luffy is so startled that he shrieked. He raises a hand to grab the object, and when his eyes recognize the thing, Luffy practically beams; a

wide smile on his face.

"My hat!"

They giggle at the sight. They had been trying hard to fix the burnt hat and it truly is worth it to see that wide smile from their captain again, after what feels like months. The smile itself has lifted up their worries, sadness, and has given them a sense of relief.

Looking at the smiles they are giving him, Luffy feels at ease. He sets aside his worry as his lips form his usual wide grin. Luffy stretches his hand and pulls them closer on a big hug.

"Thank you," he whispers.

It feels warm.

It feels right. This is how it's supposed to be. Luffy is supposed to be smiling. They are supposed to be there to be his comfort. The nightmare isn't supposed to happen.

Then they are reminded of something. The nightmare disappeared thanks to someone. Someone who hasn't showed any sign of waking up any time sooner. Someone who had made a bet, risking his everything for their captain.

Luffy stares at Zoro and without him realizing, his hand goes up to rub the tiny cut mark on his chest. He smiles bitterly and looks at Chopper.

"When will he wake up?"

Chopper shakes his head and climbs up to Zoro's bed. "I'm not sure. Normally it would probably take weeks, even months, but in Zoro's case... We never know."

At Luffy's saddened face, Chopper hastily adds, "But he's okay! He's not in any danger! He will definitely wake up soon!"

Luffy smiles and nods, "Yup. He will. Zoro said everything's gonna be all right."

None of them dares to ask what happened. None of them even has the slightest intention to simply mention anything about that nightmare. It is unnecessary. They are fine and that's enough.

Being together like this is all they ever need to feel happy and satisfied.

****_x_****

In Zoro's case, we never know.

It is faster than anyone can ever imagine.

Late that night, Luffy wakes up to someone rubbing his head. When he opens his eyes, he is greeted by the sight of a weary but smiling Zoro sitting on his bedside, gently rubbing his head.

Luffy gasps as his eyes widen in shock and his lips form a wide, wide grin.

"Zoro!"

Zoro lets out a chuckle. "Glad that you're okay, captain."

Luffy has many many things he wants to say, but he pushes them to the back of his mind and simply says, "Because I have faith in you, that's why."

Zoro smiles. He is way beyond relieved that he didn't fail. He has succeeded. His captain is fine and everything's all right. Surely he can't ask for more than this.

"But I hate you, Zoro."

Zoro is taken aback by the sudden comment that he almost falls to the floor. "What?"

"Because you tried to kill yourself. I hate it."

Zoro opens his mouth only to close it again when he realizes that he has no rights to complain. He was at fault.

"...Sorry," is the only word he whimpers.

Then Luffy giggles. "But it's okay. Everything's all right now. We're so close to our dreams and soon I'll become the Pirate King and everyone is with me andâ€¦ Andâ€¦"

His sentence is cut off when Luffy chokes on tears. "And I'm just so happy..."

Zoro takes a deep breath. He can feel the joy building inside him. How long has it been since he was saved? It all started on that lousy Marine base, and now they are here, almost at the end of their journey. With this crew â€" this family â€" they had survived through countless fights and adventures; it is almost unbelievable, isn't it?

After all this time... "Finally, huh?"

Luffy takes his hat from the bedside and plays it in his hands, smiling delightfully. "I guess we will set sail tomorrow. I can't wait! Are you okay with that, Zoro?"

Zoro feels fatigue consuming him as he stands up. "As you wish, captain."

He then pats Luffy's head gently and walks back to his bed. "Now, you're still healing, right? Go to sleep, Pirate King."

The two words make Zoro smiles. It feels so right. Soon everyone will call his captain like that, and the thought alone is dreamy enough to widen his smile even more.

"Zoro,"

Zoro looks up from his bed. To be honest, his wounds still throb with

every movement he makes, but he knows that if he doesn't wake up sooner, Luffy and the others will worry and they will never set sail before he wakes up. So Zoro has fought his own unconsciousness to wake up for a while; just for a little while " to see with his own eyes that everyone is all right and Luffy is smiling again.

"Yeah?"

Luffy smiles a wide smile that immediately erases all of Zoro's fears and worries. It truly is worth the struggle to wake up.

"Thank you."

Zoro replies with a smile. "Anytime, captain."

* * *

><p>-x- THE END **~x~**

* * *

><p>and that's that.

How was it? Did I meet your expectations when you clicked this story? Was it angsty enough?

Ahh, writing in present tense was so hard ==_

>Please don't hesitate to point out any mistakes I've made. That will help me learn too~ xD

_Thank you so much for reading! Mind leaving your thoughts below?
:)_

_-FVsei-__

End
file.